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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000093

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [NS](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT VENETIAAN'S GOVERNMENT FACING LOW
APPROVAL RATINGS

REF: (A) PARAMARIBO 038 (B) 05 PARAMARIBO 589 (C) 05

PARAMARIBO 607 (D) PARAMARIBO 90

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11. (U) SUMMARY: More than 100 days into his second consecutive term, approval ratings for President Venetiaan and his New Front plus coalition are down, with 64% of respondents disapproving of the government's performance, according to a recent public opinion poll. Former military dictator and convicted narcotics trafficker Desi Bouterse's opposition National Democratic Party (NDP), which is the largest single political party, has gained popular support. Strife within the coalition, an aggressive opposition, and corruption scandals have all contributed to the government's woes. End Summary.

12. (U) The poll was conducted by IDOS, a respected independent polling group affiliated with Suriname's university, from January 4-6 among 504 people in Paramaribo where roughly half of Suriname's 492,829 inhabitants live. It revealed a Surinamese public decidedly dissatisfied with its leaders. The largest complaint, expressed by 78 percent of respondents, was that government policy lacks clarity. Only 14 percent of those polled claimed to be satisfied with the government's performance, while 62 percent indicated they were dissatisfied. Twenty-four percent were indifferent. Seventy percent of the respondents claimed to have no confidence in the President or his cabinet.

13. (U) The poll showed mounting criticism from the governing coalition's own supporters. Eighteen percent of those who voted for the New Front in the 2005 elections, would vote for a different political party, if given the opportunity to vote today; more than nine percent of these voters said Bouterse's NDP would be their new choice. Twenty percent of respondents who voted for New Front in May 2005 elections would choose not to vote at all.

14. (U) If elections were held today, 32 percent of respondents would vote for the NDP; 21 percent for the New Front; 10 percent for former President Wijdenbosch's VVV coalition; and 4 percent for the all-Maroon A-Combination, which is part of the New Front Plus. Ten percent would vote for various other parties with 23 percent saying they would not vote at all. (Note: The next elections are scheduled for 2010. End Note.)

15. (U) The survey also showed significant public displeasure in the government's domestic economic policies; 63 percent complained that their own economic situation had

gotten worse compared to six months before; 64 percent of those who saw their situation worsen see their situation worsening even more over the coming six months. Only four percent said their economic situation was better than six months ago, while 33 percent said it was the same.

¶6. (U) In other results of note, 85 percent of respondents disagreed with parliamentarian Sharmila Mangal-Mansaram's assessment that convicted narcotics trafficker and A-Combination National Assembly member Ronnie Brunswijk qualifies as a "freedom fighter" for his role in leading the rebel group Jungle Commando in the late 1980's. Only nine percent of those polled think that former Minister of Trade and Industry Siegfried Gilds is innocent in the money laundering investigation against him (See ref A). A dismal four percent think that former Minister of Public Works Dewanand Balesar is innocent of the corruption charges he is facing. (See ref B).

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) The eight party New Front Plus coalition government has yet to articulate its vision for Suriname and what it plans to accomplish during its term. The macro-economic situation has improved, buildings are under construction everywhere in Paramaribo and several dynamic new ministers are busy formulating plans for tackling the country's myriad problems. However, the failure to engage the public, the stumbles with the gas price hike (See ref C) and the preoccupation with intra-coalition politics have resulted in the public's loss of confidence. The opposition has seized on every misstep to make political points. (See ref D). We question whether the President and Vice-President, aging political veterans, can develop the public relations savvy to convince the nation that their current course is the best course.

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BARNES